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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: KOSOVO: MONTENEGRO DELEGATION DISCUSSES
ESTABLISHING TIES AND MINORITY REPRESENTATION

Classified By: Ambassador Tina Kaidanow for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (U) Summary. Montenegrin Deputy Assembly Chairman Rifat Rastoder led a government delegation on a visit to Pristina on January 27-28. Montenegro, which recognized Kosovo on October 9, sent the delegation to discuss establishing diplomatic relations with Kosovo, the status of ethnic Montenegrins residing in Kosovo, and the return of Roma refugees living in Montenegro. The delegation met with President Sejdiu, Assembly President Krasniqi and other senior Kosovo leaders. Local media was positive in its coverage of the visit and described the meetings as cordial. We anticipate -- based on conversations between the Montenegrin and Kosovo Foreign Ministers -- that diplomatic relations between the two countries will be established shortly after Montenegrin elections in late March, and that the issue of ethnic Montenegrin rights in Kosovo will not hinder this process. Nevertheless, we will encourage the GOK to consider public gestures towards the Montenegrin community and will continue to urge the Kosovo government to address the issue of IDP returns (of any ethnicity) from Montenegro. End Summary.

12. (C) Rifat Rastoder, Montenegro's Deputy Assembly Chairman, visited Pristina January 27-28 with an official delegation including the Minister of Minority Rights, the Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs and senior officials from the Foreign Ministry, the President's Office, and the Office for Refugee Affairs. The delegation called on President Sejdiu on January 28. Embassy contacts and media accounts report that the delegation requested that the GOK grant ethnic Montenegrins in Kosovo with legal and constitutional status equivalent to other officially recognized minority groups in Kosovo. An ethnic Montenegrin activist in Kosovo with close ties to Podgorica told the Embassy that the delegation also pressed Kosovo interlocutors to grant ethnic Montenegrins guaranteed representation in Kosovo institutions; either three seats in the Kosovo Assembly or three senior positions in the government. However, the Montenegrins did not condition establishing diplomatic ties with changes in Kosovo's constitutional framework affecting minorities.

13. (C) Kosovo Deputy Prime Minister Rame Manaj, who met with the delegation, told us that it was unlikely that the GOK would accommodate Podgorica's demands for equal legal status for ethnic Montenegrins. Manaj noted that Kosovo's

constitution already guarantees equal rights for all of its citizens, including--but not specifying--ethnic Montenegrins.

He said giving Montenegrins equal status with other officially recognized minority groups -- an action that would guarantee them representation in the Kosovo Assembly -- would require Pristina to amend its constitution, an arduous process requiring super majorities in the Assembly and also from the Assembly's minority MPs. Manaj said Pristina would cooperate with Podgorica on IDP issues, and would look for other ways to be accommodating.

¶4. (C) Assembly President Krasniqi informed Ambassador on January 28 that Rastoder raised the issue of ethnic Montenegrins' representation in the Assembly, a move that, in addition to requiring an amendment to the constitution, would also alter the composition of the 120-member body. Ambassador cautioned that although a constitutional revision recognizing the minority rights of Montenegrins was not objectionable on its face, any proposal to grant parliamentary seats to ethnic Montenegrins must be consistent with Pristina's obligations under the Ahtisaari Plan. Specifically, the inclusion of Montenegrins in the Assembly cannot come at the expense of other minority seats. Ambassador urged Krasniqi to find ways to address the Montenegrins' issues that fell short of amending the constitution and suggested Pristina consider engaging with Podgorica on Roma refugee return issues. Krasniqi indicated parliamentary representation was not on the table, but Pristina would consider other steps to recognize the Montenegrins' concerns, including appointments of Montenegrins to the minority consultative council or hiring

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Montenegrins for prominent government positions.

¶5. The delegation also pressed Pristina to cooperate on returning ethnic Roma and "Egyptian" refugees who fled Kosovo in the 1990s and are primarily living in two refugee camps in Montenegro. According to official Montenegrin figures, there are approximately 3000 Roma and 1400 "Egyptians" from Kosovo residing in Montenegro. All internally displaced persons (IDPs) from Kosovo in Montenegro total 16,210. (Note: The 1991 Yugoslav census identified approximately 20,000 Montenegrins living in Kosovo, but no count has been made since then. The current Montenegrin population in Kosovo is estimated to be significantly smaller since many Montenegrins identified with the Serb community and left after the 1999 conflict. Also, there is no accurate count available of the number of former Kosovo Montenegrins residing in Montenegro who desire to return to Kosovo. End Note.)

¶6. (C) Comment: Two associations claiming to represent ethnic Montenegrins residing in Kosovo have, in the past, also requested official recognition in Kosovo institutions and special representation in the Assembly. These efforts have always failed to gather steam because Montenegrins in Kosovo are few in number and not particularly vocal, and local Montenegrin activists have made little effort to organize or to provide information on where the Montenegrin population is concentrated in Kosovo. We anticipate -- based on conversations between the Montenegrin and Kosovo Foreign Ministers -- that diplomatic relations between the two countries will be established shortly after Montenegrin elections in late March, and that the issue of ethnic Montenegrin rights in Kosovo will not hinder this process. Nevertheless, we will encourage the GOK to consider public gestures towards the Montenegrin community and will continue to urge the Kosovo government to address the issue of IDP returns (of any ethnicity) from Montenegro. End Comment.

KAIDANOW